

## Book Reviews

*The Legal Fraternity and the Making of a New South Community, 1848-1882.* By Gail Williams O'Brien. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986. Acknowledgments, introduction, tables, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xi, 231. \$23.50.)

The first half of this short study of Guilford County, North Carolina, aims to test the thesis that after 1865 a new entrepreneurial class replaced prewar planters as holders of social, economic, and especially political power in the South. Finding that attorneys were comparatively more important after than before the Civil War, O'Brien in the second part of the book intensively analyzes the economic and political activities of a small group of particularly important men. The author concludes that southern leadership did not change much and that it was never "pre-capitalist." Her conclusions, however, are partly undermined by problems in research design.

A piedmont county in which slaves constituted but 16 percent of the population and only forty whites owned twenty or more blacks in 1860, Guilford was hardly a microcosm of the Old South. In 1880, twenty-five to thirty times as large a proportion of those employed in the county worked in agriculture as in factories, and industrialization was a mere speculative glimmer among boosters of the village of Greensboro (population 2,105), not a reality. In this setting one could not expect to find stark contrasts between a prewar planter paternalist hegemony and that of a postwar capitalist middle class.

O'Brien's praiseworthy effort to provide explicit measures of power and continuity raises definitional questions that nonquantified studies finesse. What activities indicate various degrees of power, and how should they be combined to form an index? Does "continuity" mean that the same people controlled affairs from decade to decade (only 19-46 percent did in Guilford, and the turnover was greatest during the 1860s)? Can one interpret "continuity" to mean that similar types of people retained power (the percentage of Guilford lawyers rose, and that of merchants fell, but many people fell into more than one category)? Does "continuity" imply the same proportion of adult males remained in control (the proportion grew by 25 percent from 1850 to 1880 in Guilford County)? Were a general decline in the economic well-being of the elite and the emergence of several young newcomers after the war large or small discontinuities? How does one chart ideologies and alterations in them? What constitutes significant change?

Since the number of "high powerholders" on whom O'Brien concentrates is so small, minor differences in definitions or in classifying people into categories might have altered her findings markedly. Moreover, if the

